United Nations E/AC.51/2012/3

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
2 April 2012

Original: English

Committee for Programme and Coordination
Fifty-second session
Substantive session, 4-29 June 2012
Item 2 of the provisional agenda*
Programme questions: evaluation

Triennial review of the implementation of recommendations made by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its forty-ninth session on the thematic evaluation of lessons learned: protocols and practices

Report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services

Summary

The present report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) is submitted in accordance with the decision taken by the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its twenty-second session (see A/37/38, para. 362) to review the implementation of its recommendations three years after taking decisions on evaluations submitted to the Committee. This triennial review determined whether or not recommendations from the thematic evaluation of lessons learned: protocols and practices had been implemented.

The Committee noted the significance of learning lessons as an important means of strengthening the activities of the Organization and raised concerns regarding the inadequacy of learning lessons and the lack of a systematic and regular approach. The Committee recommended that the General Assembly take note of the report of OIOS, which contained five recommendations, and made five recommendations of its own.

Three out of the five recommendations of the Committee have been implemented and two have not.

* E/AC.51/2012/1.

12-28167 (E) 190412

Please recycle

The recommendation that the Secretary-General define the "lessons learned" concept in order to develop a framework for the collection and sharing of lessons learned has not been implemented. While system-wide and Secretariat-wide knowledge management task forces have been established to address the issue within the larger context of strengthening knowledge management, there is still no single and common definition of "lessons learned" in the Secretariat.

The recommendation that the Secretary-General ensure that lessons learned are widely disseminated and used for future planning has been implemented. The Executive Office of the Secretary-General has promoted lessons-learning through the annual senior manager assessment process. The biennial programme performance report and related interim reports also require that a focus be placed on lessons learned. In addition, a knowledge management strategy and plan is being developed for the Secretariat. Individual programmes have implemented lessons-learned initiatives such as online best practices portals and reports.

The recommendation that the Secretary-General ensure that findings and recommendations derived from evaluations are disseminated, discussed and acted upon has been implemented, with the establishment of an online Secretariat-wide database of evaluations scheduled to be in place by the end of the first quarter of 2012.

The recommendation that the Secretary-General examine ways to enhance the role of coordination bodies within the Secretariat in facilitating the sharing of lessons learned among programmes has been implemented. Coordinating bodies have established mechanisms for facilitating the sharing of information, including lessons learned, among programmes.

The recommendation that the Secretary-General consider, in the context of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 63/276, ways for Member States to have systematic access to lessons learned has not been implemented. No mechanism has been developed for Member States to have systematic access to lessons learned.

The recommendation that the Secretary-General consider, in the context of the implementation of General Assembly resolution 63/276, ways for Member States to have systematic access to lessons learned has not been implemented. No mechanism has been developed for Member States to have systematic access to lessons learned.

I. Introduction

1. At its forty-ninth session, the Committee for Programme and Coordination considered the report of the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS) thematic evaluation of lessons learned: protocols and practices (E/AC.51/2009/5). The objective of the evaluation was to identify and assess the systems and mechanisms for identifying, capturing and disseminating lessons learned in United Nations Secretariat programmes.[1] As such, the evaluation examined the systems and protocols used by programmes to collect and utilize lessons, identified significant gaps and determined the extent to which lessons learned had been integrated into programme operations to enhance performance.

2. The Committee noted the significance of learning lessons as an important means of strengthening the activities of the Organization and also noted that the report provided a clear and valid analysis of the topic. The Committee recommended that the General Assembly take note of the report, which contained five recommendations, and made five recommendations of its own (see A/64/16, paras. 77-85).

3. The objective of the triennial review is to report on the status of implementation of the five recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination. While all of the recommendations were addressed to the Secretary-General, the evidence presented in this review is primarily at the programme level.

4. The methodology for the review included: (a) a review and analysis of biannual progress reports on the status of recommendations that are monitored through the OIOS Issue Track database; (b) an analysis of relevant information, documents and reports obtained from programmes; and (c) interviews with managers and staff in 10 programmes, 4 of which also serve as conveners of coordinating bodies, and 2 additional coordinating bodies.[2]

5. A draft of the report was shared with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Department of Field Support, the Department of Management, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Public Information, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the International Trade Centre (ITC), the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of Information and Communications Technology,

[1] For the purposes of the evaluation, the term "Secretariat programmes" refers to programmes that receive financing, in part or in whole, from the regular budget and are therefore within the oversight mandate of OIOS. The term includes programmes with a substantive mandate and those with a management and support services mandate.

[2] The 10 programmes were: the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Department of Field Support, the Department of Management, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Public Information, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Office of Information and Communications Technology and the Office of the Special Adviser on Africa. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Department of Political Affairs and the Executive Office of the Secretary-General also serve as conveners of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs, the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs, the Executive Committee on Peace and Security and the Policy Committee. In addition, interviews were held with the CEB secretariat and the United Nations Development Operations Coordination Office as conveners of CEB and the United Nations Development Group.

the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the secretariat of the United Nations System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) and the Development Operations Coordination Office. While their informal comments have been incorporated as appropriate, there were no formal comments to append to the report.

II. Results

6. Of the five recommendations of the Committee for Programme and Coordination, three have been implemented and two have not. The implementation status of each recommendation is set out below.

Recommendation 1: The Secretary-General should define the "lessons learned" concept in order to develop a framework for the collection and sharing of lessons learned.

7. In its evaluation, OIOS noted that there was no widely agreed upon and common definition of what constitutes "lessons learned" in the Secretariat. While system-wide and Secretariat-wide knowledge management task forces have been established to address this issue within the larger context of strengthening knowledge management, neither has developed a common definition of lessons learned. On the other hand, individual programmes within the Secretariat have established and are working with similar definitions.

8. The system-wide Task Force on Knowledge Sharing, which was established to develop a strategy for enhancing the sharing of knowledge in the United Nations, including a possible common definition of lessons learned, is no longer active and did not formulate a system-wide definition of lessons learned. Furthermore, while one of the goals of the Working Group on Knowledge Management (formerly known as the Secretariat Task Force on Knowledge Sharing) is to help build an effective collaborative environment in which United Nations personnel and their stakeholders capture, share and own the substantive knowledge relevant to their expertise (see A/62/793, table 1), this group has not developed a common definition of lessons learned at the Secretariat level.

9. In the context of these larger organizational initiatives, individual programmes have defined for themselves the concept of lessons learned in various publications and websites, often as part of programme evaluation policies. Some examples are presented in table 1.

Table 1
Definitions of lessons learned

Programme	*Definition*
Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs	Generalizations based on evaluation experiences with projects, programmes, or policies that abstract from the specific circumstances to broader situations. Frequently, lessons highlight strengths and weaknesses in preparation, design and implementation that affect performance, outcome and impact.

Programme	*Definition*
Department of Peacekeeping Operations/Department of Field Support	Lessons that have been identified from past actions, projects and operations and which are being applied or taken into account. Lessons can be positive or negative, in that they may recommend that an approach be replicated or avoided in the future.
International Trade Centre	The process by which individuals and organizations create, transfer and use knowledge in order to achieve positive change and realize their goals.

10. This recommendation has not been implemented. While individual programmes have defined lessons learned, a Secretariat-wide definition would need to be established in order for the recommendation to be considered to have been implemented.

Recommendation 2: The Secretary-General should ensure that lessons learned are widely disseminated and used for future planning.

11. OIOS concluded that most Secretariat programmes lacked a systematic approach to identifying, capturing, disseminating and using lessons learned. To a large extent, at the time of the evaluation, lessons were collected and shared on an ad hoc basis and informal mechanisms were relied on. The most commonly used means for learning lessons were personal experience and informal communication among staff.

12. While lessons-learning is a decentralized function, with no single entity assuming responsibility for lessons learned within the Secretariat, the Executive Office of the Secretary-General has taken some initiative to promote such learning. In a joint effort with the Department of Management, it captures lessons learned through the annual senior manager assessment process and shares them with the Management Performance Board. If the Board believes that the broader Secretariat community can benefit from the suggestions, the Deputy Secretary-General shares a summary of the suggestions with all Under-Secretaries-General. The Board also makes specific suggestions to individual offices based on the feedback received through this annual exercise.

13. The biennial programme performance report on all Secretariat programmes produced by the Department of Management also requires that a specific focus be placed on lessons learned during reporting. Since 2008, the Department has issued interim programme performance reports enabling programme managers to record lessons from programme implementation more regularly.

14. Furthermore, the Working Group on Knowledge Management is developing a strategy and plan for the Secretariat such that processes, best practices and lessons learned can be more uniformly kept and made accessible with the help of knowledge management tools and policies (see A/62/793, para. 54). Members of the Working Group include subject-matter experts from executive and administrative offices of

12 departments and offices who meet regularly to discuss the objectives set out in table 2.[3]

Table 2
Office of Information and Communications Technology knowledge management programme[a]

Goal	Provide an effective collaborative environment in which United Nations personnel and their stakeholders capture, share and own the substantive knowledge relevant to their expertise
Objectives	• Retain institutional knowledge
	• Facilitate and enhance knowledge-sharing and collaboration
	• Improve organization, accessibility and usability of information
	• Utilize open-source solutions where appropriate
	• Improve websites and web content management
	• Improve and enhance analytical and decision support capabilities
	• Improve information management policies and processes

[a] A/62/793, table 1.

15. One tool that the Office of Information and Communications Technology has developed and made available to promote lessons-learning in the Secretariat is a project management framework for programmes dealing with information and communications technology (ICT) projects that incorporates a lessons-learned log. Programme managers can use the log after each task and project is completed or terminated to pass on any lessons that can be usefully applied to other projects.

16. Within this larger organizational context of valuing the dissemination and use of lessons learned for planning, individual programmes have implemented initiatives for strengthening the capture and sharing of lessons learned. The Department of Peacekeeping Operations and the Department of Field Support have a knowledge-sharing policy that outlines the framework for the collection and sharing of lessons learned. The framework is based on two complementary elements: human and documentary. The human element comprises a network of civilian, police and military best practices officers and focal points deployed in peacekeeping missions. There are also 26 communities of practice whereby community members in field missions, at United Nations Headquarters and in the United Nations system share and request knowledge. The documentation element consists of the Best Practices Toolbox and the Policy and Practice Database. The toolbox contains guidance and

[3] Members are the Department of Public Information, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the Department of Economic and Social Affairs, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the Department of Political Affairs, the Department of Management, the United Nations Office at Geneva, the United Nations Office at Vienna, the United Nations Office at Nairobi, the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, the Office of Information and Communications Technology and the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management.

templates for end-of-assignment reports, after-action reviews and guidance for surveys of practice and lessons-learned studies. The best practices and lessons-learned documents created using the toolbox are accessible from the Policy Practice Database. The toolbox and database are managed by the Peacekeeping Best Practices Section of the Policy, Evaluation and Training Division of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations.

17. The Department of Political Affairs also has a "Share your knowledge" portal, launched in October 2010 and administered by the Guidance and Learning Unit, whereby similar best practices tools are available to the Department's staff at Headquarters and in the field. Those tools help staff to share lessons and good practices and ensure that relevant recommendations from the field reach Headquarters as directly as possible.

18. In the Department of Management, the Office of the Under-Secretary-General published a three-volume guide for managers entitled "Lessons learned from the jurisprudence of the system of administration of justice", the purpose of which was to enhance managers' understanding of the Organization's system of administration of justice. In addition, the Office of the Under-Secretary-General led a Department-wide lessons-learned study on the response to the crisis in Haiti to draw lessons from the experience and identify remedial action to strengthen the organizational response and its readiness to respond to future crisis situations.[4] The results were discussed in various forums, including by the CEB High-level Committee on Management and at interdepartmental meetings. A working group was formed that led to the implementation of an action plan.

19. The Evaluation and Communications Research Unit of the Department of Public Information supports the Department's commitment to foster a culture of evaluation by providing support aimed at learning about and improving the effectiveness and impact of the Department's products and services. For example, after the 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference, the Unit produced a report on the impact of communications before, during and after the conference, drawing on lessons learned from previous media-monitoring exercises.

20. A further example of incorporating lessons learned in the planning process was the revision of the OHCHR thematic strategy for 2012-2013 on the basis of lessons learned in the course of the two years of its implementation in the prior biennium. An analysis of results highlighted areas where little or no results for a specific expected accomplishment had been reported; results had been reported for a thematic priority with no corresponding thematic expected accomplishments; overlaps had been identified among thematic strategies; or the achievement of results indicated that implementation was working well. The groups in charge of the various thematic strategies used the analysis in its planning process for 2012-2013.

21. This recommendation has been implemented.

[4] After-Action Review of the Haiti Crisis Response: Lessons Learned & Action Plan, September 2010.

Recommendation 3: The Secretary-General should ensure that findings and recommendations derived from evaluations are disseminated, discussed and acted upon.

22. The OIOS evaluation concluded that the use of evaluations as a source of lessons learned to achieve greater organizational learning and to influence the design, planning and implementation of programmes, subprogrammes and projects was limited. This point was also emphasized by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, in its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2012-2013, when it stressed the importance of regular monitoring and evaluation of programme activities to determine the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and impact of the Organization's activities and also considered that such activities were a central element of effective management (A/66/7, para. 49). The Advisory Committee welcomed the information that the Secretary-General provided on benefits from monitoring and evaluation, including outlining lessons learned and following up on recommended solutions and good practices (ibid., para. 54).

23. With respect to disseminating evaluation results and recommendations, the Secretary-General has approved a fast-track initiative to establish a Secretariat-wide online database of evaluations, with corresponding procedures, to provide programmes with access to these valuable sources of lessons learned.[5] In addition, as stated in his report on progress towards an accountability system in the United Nations Secretariat (A/66/692), the Secretary-General remains committed to implementing the recommendations of the oversight bodies. The implementation of the recommendations is part of the senior managers' compacts, and the Department of Management reports quarterly on the status of implementation to the Management Committee. The Secretary-General has also taken steps to strengthen the accountability chain vis-à-vis the oversight bodies by defining, through administrative issuances, the roles and responsibilities within the Secretariat in relation to the engagements, reports and recommendations, including those emanating from evaluations, of the oversight bodies. For example, a network of focal points is now in place to provide appropriate responses to evaluation recommendations made by the oversight bodies.

24. At the programme level, some programmes have reported improving how they disseminate, discuss and act upon results and recommendations derived from evaluations. For example, the evaluation strategy of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs states that evaluation activities provide only limited value added if they are not used in the sense of implementing recommendations and making conceptual use of key findings to strengthen policies and other related decision-making processes. The senior management team comments on all recommendations made in the evaluations through a management response matrix, and the endorsed recommendations are integrated into the plans of the Office. The evaluation policy of the Department of Political Affairs similarly outlines a mechanism to apply evaluation results and recommendations. The policy contains, inter alia, the following provisions:

[5] The Change Plan: Proposals by the Change Management Team to the Secretary-General, December 2011 (para. 80). Available from www.un.org/sg/pdf/the-change-plan.pdf.

(a) Linking evaluation to organizational learning and knowledge management systems: the governing bodies, the head of each subprogramme/unit and the evaluation officer must work together to ensure that evaluation contributes to improved decision-making and results-based management;

(b) Acceptance or rejection of recommendations: the findings, conclusions and recommendations of each evaluation report should be subject to a review by relevant stakeholders in the Department, ideally through its senior management team, against a set of criteria specified in the terms of reference for each self-evaluation exercise. The response to each evaluation should be tracked to include comments of acceptance, non-acceptance and plans for follow-up action;

(c) Monitoring and implementation of recommendations: evaluation reports will specify the programme managers responsible for the implementation of any recommendations endorsed by the senior management team. Reports that track the status of compliance and the implementation of evaluation directives must be prepared and disseminated periodically by the Office of the Under-Secretary-General.

25. In addition, the evaluation policy of the International Trade Centre notes that evaluation is designed to ensure timely, valid and reliable information that will be relevant for the subject being assessed and that there is clear intent to use the evaluation findings, recommendations and lessons learned. The ITC evaluation focal points inform their divisions of the lessons learned from evaluations and facilitate their adoption, in particular in the context of project and programme formulation and approval within their divisions.

26. This recommendation has been implemented.

Recommendation 4: The Secretary-General should examine ways to enhance the role of coordination bodies within the Secretariat in facilitating the sharing of lessons learned among programmes.

27. OIOS concluded that coordination within and among programmes in the area of lessons learned was limited and that the main coordinating bodies of the Organization had played only a minor role in facilitating the sharing of lessons among programmes. Subsequent to the evaluation, coordinating bodies have improved mechanisms for sharing information and lessons learned among programmes. They serve as forums for fostering knowledge-sharing to enhance transparency, develop consensus and learn and apply successful practices and policies among programmes. Examples from the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs, the Executive Committee on Peace and Security, the Policy Committee and the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs are discussed below.

28. In the humanitarian affairs arena, a compendium of agreed actions was developed and endorsed by the Inter-Agency Standing Committee principals in 2011, which includes the Executive Committee on Humanitarian Affairs. As initiated by the Emergency Relief Coordinator, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs took the lead in facilitating the sharing of lessons learned across the entire United Nations humanitarian system. The Inter-Agency Standing Committee principals reviewed the humanitarian response model and made adjustments building on the lessons learned in 2010 and 2011.

29. In the peace and security arena, the Executive Committee on Peace and Security facilitated the sharing of lessons learned among programmes in the context of the Arab Spring and non-mission settings. In response to this challenge, the Executive Committee convened meetings where lessons were shared from Tunisia and Egypt, resulting in policy recommendations on non-mission settings, which also resulted in the submission of a policy on special circumstances in non-mission settings, which was endorsed by the Secretary-General in January 2012. The policy has been disseminated to resident coordinators and implemented in the Syrian Arab Republic.

30. In the economic and social affairs arena, subsequent to a meeting held on 14 December 2010, a Lead Economists Network became operational. It was set up to ensure coherence and cooperation within the United Nations system's analytical work and policy guidance and has been engaged in knowledge-sharing and collaborative work on forthcoming intergovernmental events and flagship publications.

31. While the coordination bodies of CEB are not limited to the United Nations Secretariat, they also act as forums for fostering knowledge-sharing to learn and apply proven successful practices among member organizations. Examples of this include the sharing of best practices from past system-wide coordination of the accident at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, which was based on lessons learned from reports on the response by CEB and its member organizations. Similarly, lessons learned from analyses and reports by CEB, such as those on the attack of United Nations offices in Algeria, were disseminated to all system entities.

32. In addition, the United Nations Development Group (UNDG) of CEB has developed an online toolkit for improved functioning of the United Nations development system at the country level, which is a repository of the guidance, lessons learned and tools deriving from the experiences of the eight "Delivering as one" pilot countries and from the experiences of United Nations country teams that have pursued efforts to become more coherent.[6] As part of the toolkit, country teams are provided with guidance notes, templates and sample documents to promote the sharing among themselves of lessons learned. On behalf of UNDG, the Development Operations Coordination Office manages the Coordination Practice Network, which connects almost 4,000 staff members from across the United Nations system, allowing them to share their good practices and experiences, launch new ideas and increase their knowledge of how to implement the United Nations reform agenda.

33. Resident coordinators and country teams report annually to the Secretary-General on their joint workplan, results and lessons learned. Country teams are required to identify and report on one or two coordination initiatives that have particularly increased efficiency and effectiveness in the delivery and impact of United Nations development activities. Country teams are also encouraged to identify any coordination initiatives that have increased the burden and transaction costs for the United Nations system or national counterparts so that corrective measures can be taken. Each year, a synthesis report is produced in which key achievements, remaining challenges and lessons learned are highlighted. The reports are distributed throughout the United Nations system and to Member States and are published on the UNDG website.

[6] http://toolkit.undg.org/overview.

34. This recommendation has been implemented.

Recommendation 5: The Secretary-General should consider, in the context of the implementation of Assembly resolution 63/276, ways for Member States to have systematic access to lessons learned.

35. Since the completion of the OIOS evaluation, a mechanism for Member States to have systematic access to lessons learned has not been developed. While a website accessible to permanent missions located in New York, called deleGATE, was launched in late 2008 to meet the informational needs of delegations working at Headquarters, it does not provide systematic access to lessons learned.

36. Improving the quality of support for Member States is a key deliverable of the long-term change plan that the Secretary-General endorsed in January 2012. Furthermore, an ICT tool, iNeed, was designed to implement a service-delivery and workflow-based application to standardize and improve the handling of services in an effort to improve their quality and reduce costs through efficient management of resources. The Change Management Team recommended that the Office of Information and Communications Technology expand iNeed by 2013 to also meet the service needs of Member States. Through this tool, Member States could request access to lessons learned when required.

37. This recommendation has not been implemented. A mechanism by which Member States are provided with systematic access to lessons learned would need to be established in order for the recommendation to be considered to have been implemented.

III. Conclusion

38. The OIOS evaluation identified the value of learning lessons for improving organizational efficiency and effectiveness. It concluded that the process was weak and that individual learning could not become organizational learning unless lessons were formally and systematically captured, documented and disseminated. Lessons that were identified needed to be adequately stored, shared and incorporated into future activities in order to help to improve programme performance.

39. Overall, during the past three years, the Secretariat has taken steps to better capture, store and use lessons learned, including by developing programme-level definitions for "lessons learned", establishing strategies and mechanisms for disseminating and using such lessons and strengthening the follow-up of evaluation recommendations. However, more needs to be done for the United Nations to truly become a learning Organization. Lessons learned need to be fully integrated into the work processes of the Secretariat in order for them to contribute to strengthening organizational performance.

(*Signed*) Carman L. **Lapointe**
Under-Secretary-General for Internal Oversight Services

2 April 2012